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The Tragedy

A Fantasy in Verse

GILBERT MOYLE

THE TRAGEDY

THE COVER DESIGN IS BY J. RUELAS

By Gilbert Moyle

THE LONG WAY

A SEQUENCE OF LOVE SONNETS

THE TRAGEDY

A Fantasy in Verse

BY

GILBERT MOYLE

BOSTON
THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY
1915

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TO F. L. P.

PROLOGUE

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Fresh from the pantomine of fairy lore,
And eager to recount the story o'er,
She sought my study and in breathless way
Told all the marvels she had seen that day:
The little princess in a spangled gown
And silver slippers and a golden crown,
The prince that came to woo her—happy pair!—
The gallant knights and lovely ladies there.
And there were scenes of splendor, temples, courts,
The prince's palace and his frowning forts;
A witch's spell, a dwarf, a giant tall,
A royal banquet in the castle hall,
And love at last triumphant over all.
She sighed and said: "I wish that I could be
The princess in a play—a tragedy!
Weave me a dream." Ere I my pledge could keep
Her tired little eyes had closed in sleep;
But Fancy, started on its vagrant way,
Began to weave the dream, the promised play.

ACT I.

ACT I.

The curtain rises; on the stage I see
A little maid, perhaps of three times three,
The counterpart in all her girlish charms
Of this wee bird that nestles in my arms;
Shy, simple, sweet, yet boldly unafraid,
A dainty little miss, a winsome maid.
The light that shimmers in her lustrous hair
Seems lovingly to pause and linger there,
As though the sunbeams in her tresses sought
A richer gold than they from Heaven had brought.
Her modest eyes, her countenance demure,
Reflect a soul within that's sweet and pure.
On her had Heaven set its fairest seal
Of love and beauty, youth's supreme appeal,
And charms unrealized but not less real.
With childhood's gentle, unassuming grace
She fills and honors honor's lofty place.
Ten little maidens wait upon her train,
And on the lawn there strive with might and main

A score of knights errant whose lance of lath
Or rough-hewn dagger lunged in mimic wrath
Brings little cries of terror or delight
From hearts that tremble while their heroes fight.
And now a youth with sheepish, downcast eyes
Advances to the front to claim the prize,
Feels rather than perceives her smile so proud
That laurel-crowns him 'mid the plaudits loud;
Then, happy, stumbles back into the crowd.

As often at the play the first scene ends
Showing not whitherwhere the action tends,
So down the curtain fell. The music's strain
Awoke sweet echoes with its sweet refrain.
Once more the gallant knights with valor strive,
Once more in lovely cheeks the roses thrive.
O happy childhood! little do you know
How rough the way, how far you soon must go!

ACT II.

ACT II.

The music ceased, again the curtain rose
Another scene, new faces to disclose.
My wandering fancy, taken unaware,
To this new picture hastens to repair
As a belated comer seeks his chair.
It is the court of Love. No king or queen
Upon a lofty throne of gold is seen;
The mighty monarch of that wide domain,
Wide as the earth and fair as heavenly plain,
Doth choose to rule unseen. A sward of green,
A flowery dell, a lake, a pleasant grove,
Wherever sighing youth delights to rove,
There is the realm and there the court of Love.
Beside a little brook that ripples through
A sylvan fairyland where young birds woo
And timid flowrets from their mossy beds
In ferny solitudes lift up their heads—
Beside the brook, with many a shout and song,
A band of youths and maidens pass along.

Some gather flowers and weave them in their hair,
For beauty evermore would be more fair;
Some dance and frolic, light of foot and heart,
And joyful all, all play a joyful part.
And so with laughter, jest and merriment,
Thoughtless of self, on others' joy intent,
They pass from view; but on the quiet air,
E'en as the Angelus at evening prayer,
Their voices linger like a blessing there.
A savage listening to the pilgrims' psalm
Might find within his heart a strange new calm
And wonder as did I when hand in hand
Fair youth and lovely love walked through the land.
But turning from a moment's reverie
The scene still peopled, still as fair I see;
For some, I find, had tarried by the way
And here and there like little children stray.
Not as they did in a tumultuous throng
With pealing laughter and a merry song,
But silently, their loudest speech a glance
And hearts a-thrill as never from the dance.
I look again and smile not to have known

My young friends of the tourney older grown
Now wandering there by two and two alone.
I see them all, the knights, the maidens fair,
Strolling about, full many a happy pair.
Methinks I almost hear their amorous sighs,
And life seems perfect under perfect skies.
Fairest of all who of the throng remained
Is the fair maid who at the tourney reigned.
Could history now unwrite its written page
And mark our day the legendary age,
I'd swear some goddess from Olympus high
To earth had come to dazzle mortal eye.
The bud that one time graced a summer hour
Is now the full bloom of a perfect flower
That charms the eye, the mind, the very soul—
I can but marvel while the moments roll.
Beside her walks a youth, tall, handsome, strong,
A likely hero for a minstrel's song.
'Twas he who at the tourney won the prize;
This time unflinchingly he meets her eyes,
Nay, now 'tis she whose glance is downward cast—
My heart stops beating quite and then beats fast.

Softly her answer comes; I hear it not,
But in a twinkling Love transfers the plot
Into a village church where sunbeams steal
Upon the pair who at the altar kneel.
Now Heaven's blessing down the parson calls;
"Amen" my heart doth add: the curtain falls.

Whether from sweet memory of the day,
Or at the happy progress of the play
Wherein she starred, the sleeping angel smiled.
Ah me, how are we all by dreams beguiled!
But her brave confidence o'ercame my fears
And with new hope I faced the coming years,
Sharing her confidence, nor doubting less
In virtue's triumph and in love's success.

ACT III.

ACT III.

Ten years have passed; the everchanging scene
But faintly hints the former fields of green.
The knights, the maids, the court of love, the church,
Have vanished all; in vain my eyes' quick search.
Now 'tis a little cottage by the sea,
Whose peaceful, pleasant murmur comes to me
Like sweetest music. Romping on the shore
Are little children. From the cottage door
A mother watches them, intent as they
Upon the mighty import of the play
That fills up childhood's busy work-a-day.
Far in the west the sun is sinking low;
Majestic splendor marks his dying glow.
I pause the while my fancy turns away
To contemplate this marvel of the day,
That ages with the hours yet onward goes
To shine in fullest glory at the close.
Would life were so! Would, when its day were done,
It too might set like yonder setting sun!

But fancy cannot wander far or long
From scenes that little children gaily throng,
So back it speeds as with a sudden cry
Their tools of labor are cast wildly by.
Pell mell they rush and gain the village street
Their sire returning from the town to greet.
Now back again, in joyful phalanx massed,
With him who could but toddle and was last
Held high in air, a youthful Jove elate
Upon Olympic shoulders. In such state
They cross the threshold of their castle home,
Where she who might not from its precincts roam
An equal welcome gives to one and all
As they besiege the mistress of the hall.
Soon round the board of simple elegance,
Which e'en Cornelia's gems might not enhance,
The family gather. Ah, a pretty sight!
Life and eternity are caught mid-flight.
Mid-flight the generations pause as though
The secret of immortal life to show:
How in the child the man shall live again;
So on and on till time doth end, and then—
How children prattle! How their laughter seems

Sauce to the food and sauce to many themes.
Lucullus feasting by the Roman sea
Such viands never knew, such company,
Such flow of wit and wisdom, such debate,
As they the story of the day relate.
The thrice proud parents gaze with loving eye
Upon their little brood and so do I,
As proudly, fondly as themselves; in truth,
I wish their fate were mine, that my own youth
Had thus been blest. My life how otherwise!
So for a moment other visions rise,
And ere I can the former scene restore
The music swells, the lights are on once more.

Methought as round the audience I gazed
That you were there and that you warmly praised
The slow unfolding of the simple tale
That might from your own life have drawn the veil.
You seemed to hear a kindred spirit call,
And apprehensive seemed, yet smiled withal.
But hear me further and the tale attend
Until the last act of the play doth end.

ACT IV.

ACT IV.

'Tis eventide; the scene an ancient room
Lost in the shadow of a darkening gloom,
Save when the fire that flickers and burns low
Flames up and half illumines with its glow.
Now on the floor its fitful radiance falls,
Upon the ceiling now, now on the walls.
Fantastic shadow-shapes that seem endowed
With all the change of Hamlet's changing cloud,
Absurd, grotesque, or ludicrous, severe,
Flit here and there, stand forth, and disappear,
Charging with mystery their brief career.
At last accustomed to the semi-gloom,
Two figures I discern within the room;
A man of noble, patriarchal mold,
And my young heroine at last grown old.
Together they have shared the passing years,
Their meed of mingled happiness and tears;
Now age has claimed them with its footstep slow,
Its temples crowned with deeply drifted snow,

And like the fire they watch life's flame burns low.
Though all is still and outwardly serene,
A certain sadness dominates the scene;
Something is lacking—ah, what can it be?
Straightway the question asks itself of me,
"Where are the children that with laugh and shout
Raced through the halls and circled in and out?"
Not there! How more than silent is the place.
Gone! it is written on the mother's face.
The old man too is looking far away,
Seemingly thinking of a bygone day.
For all their little brood have flown afar
And fancy can but wonder where they are.
Mayhap some dwell in distant lands alone;
Some may have nests and nestlings of their own.
But whether roaming 'neath a tropic sky,
Or gathered 'round their own firesides nearby,
Or sick, or well, of fate the wretched pawn,
Or to high honor risen—they are gone!
And O the void they left in home and heart
To bring such joy to life and then depart.
Methinks I hear the father sadly sigh,

A tear has started from the mother's eye;
And so, unconscious quite the old folks seem
Of all but their own thoughts, as in a dream.
The clock ticks on—not many hours remain—
A storm beats wildly 'gainst the window pane.
Anon there comes with dull monotony
The angry murmur of the savage sea.
Again the old man sighs, again a tear
Gleams on the mother's cheek, a diamond sphere.
No word is spoken, yet their minds seem fraught
With the fine harmony of kindred thought,
In whose close meshes I at last am caught.
Then in a flash the meaning comes to me—
O Age, 'tis thou, thou art the tragedy!

The vision faded. Lying in my arms,
The sweet possessor of a thousand charms,
Was my wee angel. Like a flower she seemed.
Ah, was she like the flower of whom I dreamed?
Would she too bloom to fade at last away,
E'en as the fairy creature of the play?

The time must come when shining locks of gold
To silver will be turned, and when the cold
Of life's dull, dreary wintertime will blight
The fairest beauty. Did I dream aright?
Was this, alas, to be her destiny?
Was this, the common fate, her tragedy?
I kissed the lovely, still unwrinkled brow
And pressed her to my heart—too close—for now
Her eyes like petals of the morn oped wide
And upward gazed to mine. She smiled and sighed.
Then seeing something wrong she raised her head
And touched my cheek. "What makes you sad?" she said.

CURTAIN

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